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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JERUSALEM 000833

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NEA FOR FRONT OFFICE, NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WATERS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/08/2017
TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [IS](#) [KPAL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#)
SUBJECT: VIGILANTES TARGET GAZA BUSINESSES/INSTITUTIONS

REF: A. 06 JERUSALEM 4874
[1](#)B. JERUSALEM 727

Classified By: Consul General Jake Walles, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary. According to Palestinian media and security sources, militants in Gaza have damaged or destroyed at least five internet cafes, two music shops, one bookstore, and three other businesses, and attacked two schools in recent weeks. In most instances, an Islamist group or groups calling themselves, varyingly, the "Swords of Right," the "Swords of Islam," or the "Islamic Swords of Right" left leaflets or publicly claimed responsibility, justifying these attacks to preserve public morals. There is a growing number of attacks on businesses and businessmen without any apparent religious/cultural motive as well, illustrating a general decline in personal/commercial security. USAID contacts and other U.S.-associated businesses and institutions express increasing worry about the declining security situation, and say attackers generally operate without fear of punishment in the absence of any effective police response. End summary.

Internet, Music Shops Destroyed

[1](#)2. (SBU) Unknown militants used improvised explosives to destroy five internet shops on April 2-4 and 14. An Islamist group (or groups) calling themselves, varyingly, the "Swords of Right," the "Swords of Islam," or the "Islamic Swords of Right" left notes, describing internet cafes as places for immoral meetings and pornography. Several other internet cafes report receiving threats that they will be attacked if they do not close their businesses. In other April attacks using similar methods, unknown militants in Gaza City destroyed a Christian bookstore (funded by the Protestant Bible Society) on April 14 and a music shop on April 15. While police told Palestinian press they believe the Swords of Right were responsible, there was no claim of responsibility for the latter attack.

American School Robbed, Bombed

[1](#)3. (SBU) On April 21, unknown gunmen robbed the Gaza City American International School of its computers and office equipment, according to Palestinian security sources, before setting off explosives in the director's office and cafeteria and lighting a school building on fire. (Ref B). PA Information Minister Mustafa Barghuthi condemned the attack but no suspects have been arrested. (Note: Possible motives include the school's U.S. association and mixed-gender student body. End Note).

UNRWA School Attacked for
Holding Coed Sports Festival

¶4. (SBU) Gunmen reportedly associated with a Salafist Muslim group attacked an UNRWA elementary school sports festival in Rafah on May 6, killing a bodyguard of Fatah PLC member Majid Abu Shammali and injuring seven others, including a child. The gunmen were protesting the festival, which they said was contrary to Islamic teachings due to its mixed-gender activities and part of a U.S. plot to spoil Palestinian teenagers' morals.

Other Businesses/Owners Attacked

¶5. (C) In the following additional incidents, businesses and their owners were targeted by Islamist vigilantes. (Note: Some of these incidents were reported in Ref B. End note):

-- UN Gaza Security officers reported that gunmen kidnapped Hasan Abu Sharkh from his electrical appliances shop April 22 west of Jabaliya and subsequently killed him. The "Swords of Islam" issued a statement apologizing for the killing, saying that Abu Sharkh was mistakenly targeted.

-- Militants fired 40 bullets into the vehicle of ConGen/USAID contact Ali al-Hayak, Deputy Chairman of the Palestinian Federation of Industries (PFI) and Chairman of the Contractors Union April 22. (Note: PLO Negotiations Chief Sa'eb Erekat suggested to ConGenOffs April 27 that al-Hayak was targeted because he is a member of the Crossings Steering Committee, and certain entities are unhappy with Karni/al-Mintar crossing reforms that negatively impact their interests. End note).

-- Militants bombed the car of a prominent Gaza

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restaurant chain owner, Muna Ghalayni, on April 17. There was no claim of responsibility or apparent motive for the attack, but one of her restaurants, called "Roots," is often frequented by Western diplomats and aid workers.

-- Militants bombed a mobile phone shop in Khan Yunis on April 18 and destroyed a barber shop in Bayt Lahiya (north Gaza) on April 19. Police blamed the "Swords of Right," but there was no clear motive or claim of responsibility for either attack.

Lack of Police Response Unnerves Gazans

¶6. (C) There has been no effective security response to the attacks on businesses and business owners, according to Gaza contacts and security sources. USAID contacts and other U.S.-associated businesses at the first Gaza Overseas Security Advisory Committee (OSAC) meeting on May 2 expressed increasing worry about the declining security situation, and said attackers generally operate without fear of punishment in the absence of any effective police response. In multiple phone conversations, Gaza National Security Forces (NSF) commander Jamal Kayyad told Poloff that police are investigating the attacks but have not detained any suspects or identified who the "Swords of Right" are. Gaza-based PLC member Rawiya al-Shawwa told Poloff May 2 that most Gazans are horrified by the bombings and kidnappings and lack of effective security response. She added, however, that she expects such attacks to increase as poor economic conditions and movement restrictions increase the appeal of extremist organizations.

WALLES